

Keynote - Summary of History of Statutory Forest and Information on Forest Waste

Background to the Definition of the Statutory Forest of Dean

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1. At the time of Domesday, the 'Forest' extended to around 100000 acres. It was loosely between 'the Severn and the Wye'. The Forest Eyre (Court) of 1282 confirmed this but added that the northern boundary was between Ross and Gloucester via Newent. It specifically though excluded Hadnock and Penyard.
2. Saxton's map of 1577 was not precise but appeared to exclude Tidenham and land west of a line from Walford to Newent. There were many land sales or gifts by the Crown in the 13th to 17th centuries some for clearance for agricultural use and others for reforestation.
3. By the mid 17th century there were many conflicting interests affecting the Forest including grazing and demand for timber for iron furnaces and there was a need for its protection against further deforestation. The Dean Forest (Reafforestation) Act of 1667 allowed the Crown to enclose at any one time 11000 acres out of the total Forest of 23000 acres to keep grazing animals from new planting.
4. There is little evidence of improvement of the supply of timber over the next 150 years despite several reports and recommendations. The need for oak for Nelson's navy resulted in the Dean Forest (Timber) Act of 1808. This reaffirmed much of the 1667 Act. This was strengthened by the Crown in 1817 reacquiring the Highmeadow Estate.
5. The 23000 acres in the two Acts extended from Coleford to Cinderford and from Ruardean to Whitecroft but there is little evidence of it being accurately recorded on the ground. It was not until 1832 that boundary markers were installed. These 218 stones were inspected by a perambulation by the Deputy Surveyor in that year. [in the last 10 years there has been a programme of replacing and refurbishing the stones]
6. During the 19th and 20th centuries land was sold and leased by the Crown for housing and for mining and other industrial development and many encroachments accepted. For example, Parkend, Pillowell, Ellwood are entirely within the Statutory Forest as is half of Cinderford.
7. The Forestry Commission was established in 1919 and all the Crown land in the Statutory Forest passed to FC by the Transfer of Woods Act 1923 and subsequent Orders.
8. The Forestry Act 1981 gave the Forestry Commission powers to sell and develop land in its ownership. However it specifically excluded the Statutory Forest of Dean with no exclusion of any other woodland in Great Britain. This was after pressure from many in the Forest, notably Dr Hart. The exemption applied to wooded areas and did not prevent sale or lease of other land owned by the Commission. However

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our policy locally in recent years has been only to sell land in the Statutory Forest in exchange for other land within the boundary. There has on this basis been a net increase in the area owned by FC in the last 10 years.

9. Forest Waste. In the 1667 Act, the term Waste of the Forest described land that was not enclosed and by this definition included wooded land. In recent times, the expression Forest Waste has been associated with the areas of open grazing land usually around communities. It is misleading to refer to all FC land within the Statutory Forest as Forest Waste as some of this is in alternative use such as industrial, education, recreation etc. It is similarly misleading to say that only FC's land is Forest Waste as there are open grazed areas in other ownerships.

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